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SUBJECT: CONGOLESE MILITARY REPLACES COMMANDER IN NORTH KIVU

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) The Congolese military (FARDC) is replacing its regional commander in North Kivu with the current chief of operations in Ituri District. FARDC officials confirmed that Brigadier General Vainqueur Mayala will be promoted to Major General and will replace General Louis Ngizo as the commander of the FARDC's 8th Military Region (North Kivu), effective immediately. Colonel Marcel Ekuba, commander of the FARDC's 1st Integrated Brigade in Ituri, will assume Mayala's post on an interim basis.

12. (C) Mayala, a native of western Bas-Congo province, has been commended for his role in helping reduce threat posed by Ituri's militias. He arrived in Ituri in November 2006 after serving as an operational commander in South Kivu. Mayala immediately renewed negotiations with militia leaders Peter Karim, Cobra Matata and Mathieu Ngudjolo that had been stalled for several months. In late November, he convinced Matata and Ngudjolo to sign new ceasefire agreements that led to the surrender of hundreds of their combatants. When Karim refused to honor a separate disarmament accord, Mayala launched a successful series of military operations that cornered the militia leader and cut him off from his supply routes. Karim subsequently surrendered and turned over some 800 fighters to military authorities.

13. (C) Ngizo, a former commander with the ANC (the armed wing of the Kigali-backed Rally for Congolese Democracy), took up the post of 8th Military Region Commander in November 2006. He had previously served as deputy commander of the FARDC in Katanga and South Kivu. Military officials and MONUC observers in North Kivu said Ngizo was not a powerful presence in the province and was often sidelined by higher-ranking FARDC officials from Kinshasa, such as Air Force Commander General John Numbi and Land Forces Commander General Gabriel Amisi. For example, Ngizo was not consulted and took no part in the December 2006 negotiations with dissident General Laurent Nkunda that produced the "mixage" process. MONUC officials said Ngizo left the provincial capital Goma May 13, less than a month after the FARDC began a new offensive against the FDLR. His next posting is not known.

14. (C) Comment: Mayala's appointment to North Kivu raises the question of whether the GDRC and FARDC are changing their approach towards armed groups in the province. Although he was criticized for making deals with the Ituri militia leaders, Mayala did bring greater stability to the region and managed the surrender of more than a thousand combatants during his tenure. The problems of North Kivu, however, are far more complicated and will require a great deal more political acumen to resolve. End comment.

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